

**BATTERY MOUNTING STRUCTURE FOR A SMALL WATERCRAFT,
AND METHOD OF USING SAME**

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[001] The present application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. 119, based on Japanese patent application No. 2002-284219, filed September 27, 2002.

1. Field of the Invention

[002] The present invention relates to a battery mounting structure for a small watercraft. More particularly, the present invention relates to a battery mounting structure for a small watercraft which provides for waterproofing protection and improves the turning characteristics of the small watercraft.

2. Description of the Background Art

[003] A personal watercraft is known as a small size craft that is constructed and arranged to glide on the surface of a sea or lake. Many jet skis and other different

types of personal watercraft are known and are commercially available.

[004] In the background art, one example of a known type of battery mounting structure for a small watercraft is described in JP-A-10-194195. Figures 6(a) and 6(b) of the present application are reproduced from the disclosure of JP-A-10-194195, and are included herein for discussion of the previously known battery mounting structures.

[005] In the above reference, as shown in Figures 6(a) and 6(b), a vessel body 1 includes a hull 1a, which constitutes a lower portion thereof, and a deck 1b for covering on top of the hull. The watercraft of Figures 6(a) and 6(b) is includes an engine inside of the vessel body, and is constructed in such a manner that a jet propeller 5 is driven by a drive shaft 3 extending rearward from an engine 2 disposed in the vessel body 1. Exhaust from the engine is expelled via an exhaust pipe 7.

[006] The drive shaft 3 is supported by a drive shaft supporting box 6 at the midsection thereof, and batteries 4a, 4b are disposed separately on the right side and the left side of the vessel body 1 as shown in Figure 6(b).

[007] Small watercrafts of the type described in the above-cited reference are

commonly used for sport racing as well as recreational purposes. In the case of sport racing, turning performance of the watercraft is a critical attribute and is a highly desirable. The ability to turn the watercraft within a tight and small turning radius is desirable for optimal performance. During operation of the small watercraft, the vessel can overturn in the water, resulting in at least a small amount of water entering the vessel.

[008] In the battery structure in the background art as described above, the heavy batteries 4a, 4b are spaced a significant distance apart, as shown, and are disposed separately on the left and the right sides of the vessel body 1. With the weight distribution provided by the battery placement shown in Figure 6(a), it is difficult to strike a weight balance and to centralize a mass (to place heavy parts at the center of the vessel as much as possible), and thus it is difficult to improve turning performance.

[009] In addition, there is such problem that when restoring the vessel body 1 to a normal posture after having rolled over in the water, one of the batteries 4a, 4b disposed separately on the left and the right sides of the vessel body 1 comes in

contact with water remaining in the vessel. Therefore, it is necessary to waterproof the batteries 4a, 4b very well, to prevent electrical problems and to insure that the operator is not stranded in open water in a “no start” condition.

[010] Although the known devices have some utility for their intended purposes, a need still exists in the art for an improved battery mounting structure for a personal watercraft. In particular, there is a need for an improved battery mounting structure for a small watercraft, in which the battery mounting structure provides waterproofing protection for a battery stored therein, and improves the turning characteristics of the small watercraft.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[011] The present invention provides a battery mounting structure for a small watercraft in which turning performance is improved, while a battery is stored in the inventive mounting structure is substantially waterproofed, so that the risk of water contacting the battery is minimized.

[012] The battery mounting structure according to a first embodiment of the invention is provided for use with a small watercraft, including a vessel body having

a hull constituting a lower portion of the vessel body, and a deck situated on top of the hull. It is intended that the watercraft include an engine disposed in the vessel body, a drive shaft extending rearwardly from the engine for driving a propeller, and a drive shaft supporting box for supporting the drive shaft at the midsection thereof. The battery mounting structure hereof is constructed and arranged to fit on top of the drive shaft supporting box so that when placed therein, the battery is disposed on the drive shaft supporting box.

[013] Consequently, the battery is disposed at the central area of the vessel body, close to the longitudinal axis thereof, and as a result, the weight balance of the batteries is substantially centralized (to place heavy parts at the center of the vessel as much as possible). As a result of this centralized weight balance, turning performance of the vessel is improved.

[014] Since the battery is disposed on the drive shaft supporting box, the battery is located at a significantly higher level above the bottom of the vessel, and thus contact with water in the hull is minimized.

[015] Therefore, when the vessel body is rotated to the upright position after

having rolled over, the battery is significantly protected from getting wet. Therefore, waterproofing of the battery may be simplified due to decreased chances of water contact.

[016] For a more complete understanding of the present invention, the reader is referred to the following detailed description section, which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. Throughout the following detailed description and in the drawings, like numbers refer to like parts.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[017] Figure 1 is a side view, partially cut away, of a small water vessel employing a battery mounting structure according to a selected illustrative embodiment of the present invention.

[018] Figure 2 is a plan view of the small water vessel of Figure 1.

[019] Figure 3 is a partly enlarged cross-sectional view taken along the line III-III in Figure 1, with some details omitted for purposes of simplicity in illustration.

[020] Figure 4 is a perspective view showing a battery mounting structure according to the selected embodiment hereof.

[021] Figure 5 is a front plan view of the battery mounting structure of Figure 4;

and

[022] Figures 6 (a) and 6(b) are explanatory drawings of a small watercraft from

the prior art, reproduced from the drawings of Japanese reference JP-A-10-194195.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[023] As shown in the drawings (mainly in Figure 1), the small watercraft 10 is a saddle riding type small watercraft in which an operator is able to sit on a seat 12 of a vessel body 11, and to operate while gripping a steering handle 13 with a throttle lever incorporated therein.

[024] The vessel body 11 is a floating structure formed by joining a hull 14 and a deck 15 for defining a space 16 inside. In the space 16, a water-cooled engine 20 is mounted at substantially the center (substantially longitudinal and lateral center) on the hull 14, and a jet pump (jet propulsion pump) 30 as propulsion means driven by the water-cooled engine 20 is mounted at the rear of the hull 14.

[025] A drive shaft (more specifically, a drive shaft for an impeller 34 described below) 35 of the jet pump 30 extends rearwardly from the engine 20, and is

supported at the midsection thereof by a drive shaft supporting box 18 via a bearing unit 24.

[026] The jet pump 30 includes a channel 33 extending from a water intake 17 opening toward the bottom through a jet flow port 31 opening toward the rear end of the vessel body to a deflector 32, and the impeller 34 disposed in the channel 33, and the drive shaft 35 of the impeller 34 is connected to an output shaft 21 of the engine 20 via a coupler 23.

[027] Therefore, when the impeller 34 is rotated by the engine 20, water taken from the water intake 17 is injected from the jet flow port 31 through the deflector 32, whereby the vessel body 11 is propelled. The throttle of the engine 20, that is, propelling power generated by the jet pump 30, is controlled by rotating the throttle lever 13a (See Figure 2) of the operating handle 13. The deflector 32 is linked to the operating handle 13 via an operating wire, not shown, and operated by rotating the operating handle 13, whereby the direction of travel can be changed.

[028] Reference numeral 40 designates a fuel tank, and numeral 41 designates a storage chamber.

[029] The small watercraft 10 of this type is sometimes used for sport racing, and when it is so used, improvement of turning performance is desired. It will be appreciated that when using conventional lead-acid batteries or other commercially available electric storage batteries for watercraft, the batteries are relatively heavy, and the placement thereof influences the boat's performance. Therefore, in a battery mounting structure according to the present invention, the battery or batteries are stored as close to the center of the boat as possible, to improve the turning performance.

[030] Another concern is that at times during operation of the small watercraft 10, the watercraft overturns in the water, and subsequently, after the vessel has been returned to its upright position, a small amount of water remains in the vessel body 11.

[031] Therefore, in the battery mounting structure according to the depicted embodiment, a battery 53 is disposed on the drive shaft supporting box, to elevate it above residual water which may pool in the bottom of the hull 14.

[032] Figure 4 is a perspective view showing a battery mounting structure

according to an illustrative embodiment of the present invention, and Figure 5 is a front view of the battery structure of Figure 4.

[033] In these drawings, reference numeral 60 designates a battery mounting structure, including a battery tray 64 joined to and integrally formed with a platform section 58. The battery mounting structure 60 has bolt holes 61, 61 formed therethrough, and has a pair of spaced apart projections 62, 63 extending downwardly on the bottom thereof, as shown. The upper and lower surfaces of the battery mounting structure 60 are formed with reinforcing ribs 66, 67 extending between the battery tray 64 and the platform section 58.

[034] The battery mounting structure 60 is attached to the aforementioned rib 14b of the hull 14 and to the drive shaft supporting box 18, so as to straddle therebetween. This is accomplished by fitting the projections 62, 63 on the bottom of the battery mounting structure 60 into the respective recesses 14c and 18a, formed on the upper surface of the hull rib 14b and on the upper surface of the drive shaft supporting box 18. The reinforcing rib 67 on the lower surface is abutted against a side surface 18b of the drive shaft supporting box 18 for positioning thereof, and then bolts, not

shown, are extended through the bolt holes 61, 61, and fixed in place by nuts (not shown).

[035] In the mounted state, the battery tray 64 is disposed on top of the drive shaft supporting box 18. This elevates the battery above the floor of the vessel body 11, and helps to keep it away from any water that may accumulate in the bottom of the hull 14.

[036] The battery 53 is indirectly emplaced on the drive shaft supporting box 18, by being mounted on the battery tray 64 which rests on the drive shaft supporting box 18. A rubber strap 53c is provided for fixing the battery 53 to the battery tray 64, by detachably placing connecting rings 53d on opposite ends of the strap over hooks 64a provided on the battery tray 64.

[037] The platform section 58 of the battery mounting structure 60 serves as a support member for a magnet box 54, and the platform structure includes mounting clamps 65 for the magnet box 54. Although only two of the mounting clamps 65 are shown in the drawings, they are formed at four points on the platform section 58.

[038] The magnet box 54 is mounted to the mounting member 60 by slidably

fitting hooks 54a on the magnet box under the mounting clamps 65, and fixing mounting arms 54b, 54b to the platform section 58 of the mounting member 60, using bolts and nuts (not shown).

[039] Reference numeral 18c designates a mounting hole of the bearing unit 24, and numeral 18d designates a maintenance hole for the bearing unit 24.

[040] The battery mounting structure hereof is provided for use on a small watercraft, which includes a vessel body 11 having a hull 14 constituting the lower portion thereof, and a deck 15 for covering the hull. The small watercraft also includes the engine 20 disposed in the vessel body 11, the drive shaft 35 extending rearwardly from the engine 20 for driving the propeller 30, and the drive shaft supporting box 18 for supporting the drive shaft 35 at the midsection thereof. In the practice of the present invention, and using the described battery mounting structure 60, the battery 53 is disposed on the drive shaft supporting box 18. Consequently, the battery 53 is disposed proximate the lateral center of the vessel body 11 (See Figure 2).

[041] Therefore, it becomes easy to strike a weight balance and to centralize a

mass (to place heavy parts at the center of the vessel body 11 as much as possible) of the vessel body 11, and thus improvement of turning performance is achieved.

[042] Since the battery 53 is disposed on the drive shaft supporting box 18, the battery 53 is located at a significantly higher level above the bottom floor 19 of the hull 14 (See Figure 1, Figure 4).

[043] Therefore, when the vessel body 11 is turned as shown by an arrow indicated by A in Figure 3 for restoring the vessel body 11 to its normal posture after having rolled over, the battery 53 is protected from getting wet significantly.

Therefore, waterproofing of the battery 53 may be simplified.

[044] Although the present invention has been described herein with respect to a limited number of presently preferred embodiments, the foregoing description is intended to be illustrative, and not restrictive. Those skilled in the art will realize that many modifications of the preferred embodiment could be made which would be operable. All such modifications, which are within the scope of the claims, are intended to be within the scope and spirit of the present invention.